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ABSTRACT

Some of the tasks undertaken by the Pittsburgh Public Schools over the past 10 years in the continuing effort to make desegregation work include the construction of new buildings and the renovation of old, restructuring of school attendance patterns, development of innovative programs, utilization of community resources and support, and the willingness to devote a lot time and effort to a frequently unpopular cause. This paper addresses itself to the efforts involving the first four activities listed above. The basic goals guiding the construction of new buildings are the improvement of racial balance, movement toward a system wide 5-3-4 grade organization, relief of overcrowding, and replacement of inefficient and obsolete building. The staff's latest proposal to restructure the attendance patterns of the school district in an effort to achieve the school district's goals for quality education is the system wide school feeder plan involving 12 middle schools. One of the most beneficial programs, for both educational and sociological purposes is the Exploratory Occupational, Vocational and Technical Education Program which introduces students to several areas of study. A program that exemplifies cooperation and support from community organizations is a mental health and intergroup relations project. (Author/AM)

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PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## MAKING DESEGREGATION WORK

Making desegregation work is not easy. We have found in Pittsburgh that a reasonable degree of working effectiveness requires a broad-front attack that includes the construction of new buildings (and the renovation of old), restructuring of school attendance patterns, development of innovative programs, utilization of community resources and support, and the willingness to devote a lot of time and effort to a frequently unpopular cause.

It is believed that the record will show that, in general, the residents of Pittsburgh are not opposed to school desegregation as a concept. Vast numbers of adults have enjoyed and accepted as a matter of fact an integrated educational experience, prior to the days when vast racially solidified communities became the rule. In recent years, as the impetus to insure racially integrated education (if not residential communities) gained momentum, resistance to school desegregation efforts did indeed surface, and clearly so. The resistance, however, seems to be directed more to the "uprooting" that the transportation of students into "out neighborhoods" seems to represent than to a rejection of school integration as a concept. Traditionally, the people of Pittsburgh have been educated in neighborhood schools (particularly at the elementary level) where it is possible to walk from one's home to classes in a few short minutes. One person recently observed, while looking at a map of the school district, that Pittsburgh probably has more school buildings per square mile than any other city in the country. This is significant when one attempts to

assess the attitudes postured by many residents about their strong attachments to their neighborhood schools and the comfort they feel in knowing their young ones, while away at school most of the day, are in fact not far from home. Of the most outspoken critics of the Pittsburgh Public Schools in the 1950's and 1960's, few would have charged the city's schools were designed to be segregated. Nevertheless, a form of de facto segregation developed. This segregation had resulted primarily from economic and housing patterns and was accelerated by the exodus to the suburbs of white families with school-age children and the subsequent increase in the number and percentage of black families in the inner-city population.

With this information as background, I would like to share with you some of the tasks we in the Pittsburgh Public Schools have undertaken over the past ten years in our continuing effort to make desegregation work.

At the beginning of my remarks, I mentioned that a broad-front attack is necessary in the move toward school desegregation. Our efforts have included the following activities: construction and renovation of buildings, restructuring of school attendance patterns, the development of innovative programs, and the use of community resources. It is to these four topics that I wish to address myself throughout the balance of this presentation.

Construction and Renovation of Buildings

In 1965, the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education undertook one of its most optimistic projects ever for school integration. It was the Great High School Plan. It called for the complete reorganization of the exist-

ing high school system into five comprehensive educational plants in which all students in grades 9-12 would be served. Each of the schools would function as the focal point for five communities.

The arrangement was seen as a means by which students from large segments of the city could be drawn together to achieve natural racial and sociological associations in facilities that would be far beyond the scope of our several smaller high school buildings. The project was perceived as one grand and monumental way to bring about racial integration and quality education for all. The estimated cost in 1965 was $100 million for all five schools.

In May, 1966, the Board obtained a vote of approval in a city-wide referendum, by a three to one margin, to issue bonds in the amount of $50 million to fund the acquisition of sites, for planning and architectural costs, and to begin construction. During the same year, the Board President appointed a citizens committee to assist the Board on problems related to the creation of racial equality in the public schools. The committee, which was formally known as the Citizens Advisory Committee on Racial Equality in Education, and informally as CACREE, studied every aspect of the district's programs and policies which had bearing on racial equality. After more than a year, the committee made a number of recommendations, which included the following:

1. The continuation of open enrollment with free transportation.

2. The busing of students from overcrowded schools to underenrolled schools.

3. The redistricting of attendance districts where such redistricting would enhance racial balance.

4. The pairing of schools to enhance racial balance.

5. The creation of racially balanced attendance districts for all middle schools and all new schools.

6. The racial integration of the staff in all schools and in central administration.

7. Rapid movement toward the building of the great high schools, all if possible, but a minimum of three--one in the East End, one on the North Side, and one on the South Side.

By 1970, the estimated cost of the great high school project had reached more than $350 million. Considerable questioning began to surface from all segements of the community regarding the tremendous costs and whether there were not more effective and far cheaper ways in which to meet the educational needs of the 1970's.

The result was action by the Board that discontinued further activity on the Great High School plan and initiated development of our Long Range Building Program.

In the intervening years, rising costs have caused us to revise and redefine our objectives in the Long Range Building Program. The basic goals, however, have been maintained. They are: the improvement of racial balance, movement toward a system-wide 5-3-4 grade organization, relief of overcrowding, and replacement of inefficient and obsolete buildings. Two recent projects typify our efforts to attain these goals. They are:

1. Reizenstein Middle School -- The newly constructed and modernly equipped school opened

in September, 1975 as a racially balanced facility. Although it was wholly populated by means of a limited open-enrollment plan, it did allow the restructuring of some former K-6 and K-8 elementary schools to the K-5 configuration, relieved some heavily enrolled facilities, and, as stated above, created another integrated facility and thus expanded the number of students enjoying integrated educational experiences. Beginning in September, 1976, we plan to phase in an assigned attendance pattern for the school. This will serve to increase the number of K-5 schools and make stable (for the reasonably foreseeable future) an integrated enrollment at Reizenstein.

(2) Brashear High School

In September, 1976, this new and modern high school will open as an integrated facility. The students are all part of an assigned attendance pattern. The opening of Brashear High School not only allows us to expand the numbers of students experiencing integrated education, but allows us to close a formerly all black high school, and expand the number of schools operating under the 5-3-4 grade structure.

It is difficult to talk about construction and renovation of buildings without also speaking about another of the basic elements being utilized in our efforts to make desegregation work. Specifically, I am referring to the organization of schools around redefined student attendance patterns. Although in November, 1972, the Board adopted a resolution that (1) set forth the position that the Board does not endorse the concept of forced busing for racial purposes, and (2) directed staff not to include the elements of forced busing solely for racial balancing purposes in their reorganization plan, staff has continued to develop school attendance plans that serve to improve the desegregation picture. The key, of course, is to effect improvements without reliance on busing, except where the nearest assigned school is more than 1.5 miles for elementary and middle schools, and 2.0 miles for secondary schools.

In February, 1973, the Board adopted a school reorganization plan that called for the construction of nine (9) new buildings and the renovation of six (6) others by 1977 at a cost of $148 million. In the intervening years, between 1972 and 1976, five of the proposed new buildings and two of the renovation projects have been completed. Again, there surfaced problems related to the ability of the school district to fund the construction program. Revisions were made in 1974 and again in 1975. The latest revisions are based on a document distributed to the Board in September, 1975, entitled Considerations for a System-Wide School Feeder Plan. (It should be noted that preparation of the school reorganization documents is tied to a directive to the School District

from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission that requires development of a plan for desegregation of the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The plan of February, 1973, and each plan thereafter, is an attempt to pursue that directive.)

The proposed plan of September 8, 1975 (certain portions were revised as of January 21, 1976) calls for the construction of two schools (in addition to the five completed to date) and the renovation of seven more schools (in addition to the two referred to earlier).

There will be further discussion on the school attendance plan.

Open Enrollment

At its Legislative Meeting on February 26, 1963, the Board of Public Education adopted a resolution that permitted, by parental choice, the enrollment of pupils in schools outside their neighborhoods, if space is available. However, the resolution made clear that the traditional neighborhood school concept was being maintained. The open enrollment plan provided an element of flexibility.

Through the resolution, it was anticipated that the following objectives would be achieved:

(1) The desire of certain parents to have their children educated in a neighborhood that is different from the one in which they live (to escape, if you will, the varying degrees of homogeneity by which many of our local neighborhoods have come to be characterized).

(2) To obtain relief for overpopulated schools (new construction to meet this goal was not financially possible) and, to the extent possible, to increase the student population in our underenrolled schools.

By October, 1963, the Board, recognizing the need to alleviate the circumstances of de facto school segregation, formed a committee to study ways to relieve the problem, but it was not until May 25, 1971, that the Board formally acted to establish a policy of assignment of pupils specifically to enhance racial balance. Prefacing all comments on the policy with a reiteration of the neighborhood school assignment system, the resolution then proceeded to speak to arrangements that allow the assignment of students residing outside the boundaries of a school with respect to the achievement of racial balance. A key clause states, in essence, that a school that is not racially balanced can be enrolled up to 100% of its capacity, with priority given to transfer requests which decrease the racial imbalance. Each spring a list of schools having student vacancies is publicized. The announcement includes facts about the number of spaces available in each of the schools and the racial groups who will be accepted for enrollment at each school. Students are reassigned on a first-come-first-served basis so long as their departure will not adversely affect the racial balance in their neighborhood schools.

In 1963, the first year of the program, a total of 372 students were reassigned under open enrollment. In 1975, the number of reassignments under the open enrollment program totaled 1,733. It should be noted that

1,411 of these students are open enrolled in grades 6, 7, and 8 at Reizenstein Middle School.

In many ways the program has been successful, particularly as it pertains to the movement of black students into predominantly white schools...and with negligible trauma.

Over the past five years, the number of students who have enjoyed an integrated educational experience (10-55% black) has grown from 26,859 pupils, out of an enrollment of 69,142 students, in 1971 to 32,822 in 1975 (from a system-wide enrollment of 62,342). These numbers reflect the amalgamation of non-neighborhood students, who in the main are transported, with the neighborhood students who are assigned to the schools on the open enrollment list.

System-Wide School Feeder Plan

Presently before the Board of the Pittsburgh Public Schools is the document entitled Considerations for a System-Wide School Feeder Plan (which was referred to earlier). It represents the staff's latest proposal to restructure the attendance patterns of the school district in an effort to achieve the school district's goals for quality education, for establishment of a 5-3-4 grade organization, and for improved integration of the schools.

The plan is built around twelve (12) middle schools. We presently have six (6) middle schools in operation. A seventh facility will open in September, 1976. Three existing elementary schools, two junior high schools, and one high school are proposed for conversion to middle schools. One new middle school is proposed to replace two antiquated middle school

structures. A new elementary school is envisioned to serve the attendance area of three present elementary schools.

If the considerations are implemented, our integration efforts would be improved, but would not be accomplished in every school.

The cost to accomplish the goals set forth in the plan has been estimated at approximately $33 million for construction (other and more spartan plans could lower the figure to the $18 million range). In either case, the sum is significantly less than our earlier plans which would have required expenditures of $148 million or as much as $350 million.

Under the plan, there would be 35 desegregated schools (10-55% black) involving an estimated 39,624 students.

Use of Innovative Programs

Perhaps one of the most beneficial programs, for both educational and sociological purposes, is our Exploratory Occupational, Vocational and Technical Education Program (known as Exploratory OVT). OVT is divided into three phases with each phase designed to meet the needs of students at one of the three middle school grades (6, 7, or 8). OVT, which is a component of the middle school program, introduces students to several areas of study. This allows each student the opportunity to explore his/her interest in a particular vocational/occupational area, to develop new skills, and to begin to understand the world of work. Subject areas include Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Merchandising, Business Communication, Information Processing, Health and Community Services, Construction, Manufacturing, Visual Communications, and Power and Transportation.

As stated above, the OVT program provides certain sociological as well as educational experiences. All schools with grades 6, 7 and 8 do not have exploratory OVT programs housed in the buildings. The cost of equipping each school to operate its own in-house program is not only excessive but impractical. In most schools the material and equipment would be grossly under-utilized. As a solution, large numbers of students are transported to two facilities that have been established as Exploratory OVT Centers. There, for a half-day each week, students participate in activities that are not only skill developing, but which also give each student an opportunity to participate in a learning experience that is racially and geographically integrated. Students for each half-day session are transported to the centers from a number of different schools and communities. Once there, the students participate in course activities that are structured in such a way as to encourage and promote the interaction of students of different races, from different communities and of different religions as they pursue class assignments and group tasks. The reference to religion in the above sentence is more than philosophical rhetoric. A number of the parochial schools in the Pittsburgh community utilize the OVT facilities, and their students are an integral part of the classes of the public school students.

Even though the experience for each student is only one-half day per week, it brings together in an integrated educational environment a total of 6,392 students throughout the week. There are an additional 5,719 participating in in-house exploratory OVT programs. This program truly serves our on-going efforts to make desegregation work.

Other important specialized programs utilized in our integration efforts are those made possible by grants received under the Emergency School Assistance Act (ESAA). Included are remedial programs to assist students in improving their academic skills, programs to promote positive interaction and experiences for groups of students who because of race are isolated from each other, and programs to bring the parents of the students in to active partnerships with the school and with each other.

Community Partnerships

The Pittsburgh Public School District has been fortunate in having a number of interested and capable community groups who have shown a willingness to provide support, in terms of services and monies, to the District's desegregation/intergroup relations efforts. Included are some of the Pittsburgh area's most prestigious organizations and charitable foundations.

A program which I feel illustrates very clearly the kind of cooperation and support from community organizations to which I referred above, is currently taking place at our newly opened (September, 1975) Reizenstein Middle School. The program, which is coordinated by a consortium of representatives of parent, educational, and civic organizations (including the school district), is a mental health and intergroup relations project designed to facilitate the bringing together, at Reizenstein Middle School, a large number of students (over 1,400) from various neighborhoods, socio-economic backgrounds, religions, and races.

The program got underway during the summer of 1975 with activities for future students and for their parents. Activities were generally held at the school although some off-campus activities were planned. The program has continued during the school year with events taking place on a regularly scheduled basis during after-school hours. The interaction of the students is generally facilitated through small discussion and activity groups based on student interests. Supplementing the structured group activities are the supervised gymnasium and swimming programs, which are open to all students. Other projects are also utilized, such as an in-house buddy system whereby incoming sixth grade students are matched with eighth grade students who assist them in their adjustment to the school.

A program of this magnitude requires considerable sums of money for the payment of staff who participate regularly in the after-school activities, for the transportation of students after the regular school day, for the services of a full-time coordinator, for additional equipment and supplies, for consultant services, and for the use of off-campus facilities. We in Pittsburgh were fortunate in that the project caught the interest of the Maurice Falk Medical Fund, whose Board approved a grant in the amount of $99,242.00 for the period July, 1975 through July 31, 1976.

In the thinking of all concerned, the first year of operation of the new Reizenstein Middle School has, to date, been successful. It is also clear to all concerned that much of that success is due to the meaningful way in which a number of responsible individuals, groups, and agencies have come together in support of our goals.

The experience at Reizenstein reflects a very special kind of community linkage; however, in other less heralded ways, the school district maintains on-going and important links with the community-at-large through its parent representatives program. The Parent Representatives are a group of some 350 elected persons who serve as a liaison between their local schools and the surrounding communities; and who, through twelve chairpersons elected by the representatives, serve as a bridge of communication to the central administration and Board Members, as well.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this statement, I made the pronouncement that "making desegregation work is not easy." In a large and complex urban community, this statement is particularly true; and in Pittsburgh, where geography forms natural community boundaries, the resolution to such problems becomes even more complex. In spite of this uniqueness, I have attempted to review with you the ways in which we in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are attempting...through construction and renovation of buildings, through the restructuring of school attendance patterns and the introduction of innovative programs, and through cooperative efforts with our communities...to make desegregation work.

There are, of course, specifics and details which have not been incorporated in this statement. I will be willing to respond directly to any inquiries or comments.

Jerry C. Olson
Superintendent of Schools
Pittsburgh Public Schools
February 23, 1976